

VETO MESSAGE ON SB 5922-S

May 17, 2005

To the Honorable President and Members,
The Senate of the State of Washington

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am returning, without my approval as to Sections 7 and 8, Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill No. 5922 entitled:

"AN ACT Relating to investigations of child abuse or neglect."

The 2005-2007 state operating budget as passed by the Legislature does not include all of the funding that the Department of Social and Health Services' (DSHS) Children's Administration has initially estimated would be needed for full implementation of this bill. I am directing the Children's Administration to develop a policy for staff to provide guidance in identifying and prioritizing those cases involving allegations of chronic neglect that staff will be authorized to provide enhanced services to within the limits of new funding specifically appropriated for this purpose in the budget.

Section 7 specifies that, as regards to reports of child abuse or neglect, evidence of a parent's substance abuse as a contributing factor shall be considered to present an imminent risk of serious harm to the child. The DSHS' child protective services investigators are required to respond to all reports indicating an imminent risk of serious harm to a child within twenty-four hours. Elevating all reports in which substance abuse is alleged to imminent risk is unnecessary. Parental substance abuse is already one of the factors considered when determining the risk level of the referral. Automatically coding all cases with substance abuse as imminent risk cases will lead to focusing emergent investigative resources on non-emergent cases.

Section 8 requires the DSHS to complete a report regarding issues associated with implementation of this bill by December 1, 2006. The bill does not take effect, however, until January 1, 2007.

For these reasons, I have vetoed Sections 7 and 8 of Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill No. 5922.

With the exception of Sections 7 and 8, Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill No. 5922 is approved.

Respectfully submitted,
Christine O. Gregoire
Governor